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The Strzygowski school of Cluj. An episode in interwar Romanian cultural politics

Matthew Rampley

Introduction: the legacy of Josef Strzygowski

It has become increasingly evident that perhaps the most influential Viennese art historian of the interwar period was Josef Strzygowski. Although a decisive figure, whose appointment as Ordinarius in 1909 led to factional rivalries and an institutional split, Strzygowski's work achieved a far greater audience than his contemporaries. This was particularly the case in central Europe, where his work was adopted as a model in territories as disparate as Estonia and Yugoslavia.

In part his influence was due to his sheer industriousness and the volume of his output, both in terms of research publications and students. Between 1909, when he took up his appointment at the Institute in Vienna, and 1932, when he retired, nearly 90 students graduated under his tutelage; this compares with 13 under Thausing and 51 under Riegl and Wickhoff combined. As one subsequent commentator has noted: 'Looking back at Strzygowski's career with the hindsight conferred by time, the most striking impression is that he was never still, perpetually buzzing around like a fly in a jam jar.'¹ The range of subjects his students wrote on was bewilderingly diverse, and covered topics as diverse as Arnold Böcklin, murals in Turkestan, Iranian decorative art, domestic architecture in seventeenth-century Sweden, Polish Romanesque architecture and the sculpture of Gandhara.² Many of Strzygowski's students would go on to become prominent members of the art historical profession across central Europe, such as the Slovene Vojslav Molè (1886-1973), who would play an important role at the University of Cracow, Stella Kramrisch (1896-1993), Emmy Wellesz (1889-1987), Virgil Vătăşianu (1902-1993), a leading art historian in Romania, Otto Demus (1902-1990) and Fritz Novotny (1903-1983). Another student of Strzygowski, Ernst Diez (1878-1961), disseminated his teacher's ideas even further; the author of a number of studies of Islamic and Asian art, Diez was also the first professor of art history in the post-Ottoman Turkish state.³

Strzygowski's own scholarly output was equally wide-ranging; aside from his well-known work on Islamic art, he wrote on early medieval Slavic art and

¹ Robert Hillenbrand, 'Cresswell and Contemporary Central European Scholarship', *Muqarnas*, 9, 1991, 27-28.

² The full list of Vienna School graduates and their dissertation topics is included in Marco Pozzetto, ed., *La Scuola Viennese di Storia dell'Arte*, Gorizia: Istituto per gli incontri culturali Mitteleuropei, 1996, 259-93.

³ Diez was author of *Die Kunst der islamischen Völker* and *Die Kunst Indiens*. On Diez's time in Turkey see Burcu Dogramaci, 'Kunstgeschichte in Istanbul: Die Begründung der Disziplin durch den Wiener Kunsthistoriker Ernst Diez'.

architecture, the architecture of Armenia, contemporary art, the medieval art of Serbia, and Quattrocento Italian painting and sculpture. This was undoubtedly the second reason for the huge impact exercised of Strzygowski's writings. As Nenad Makuljević argues in his contribution to this volume, Strzygowski became an important figure in Serbia due, initially, to his involvement in the publication of a medieval Serbian psalter in the state library in Munich.⁴ The fact that he was the holder of a prestigious position in a leading central European university, meant that Strzygowski's decision to publish the psalter was seized on as a source of legitimisation by a Serbian government anxious to garner cultural recognition across Europe. More generally, too, Strzygowski's attempt to reorient the geography of art history away from the traditional centres of Italy and Western Europe was seen as hugely important by art historians working the overlooked 'margins' of European culture. Although often dismissed by subsequent commentators as a reactionary antisemite with questionable methods, he was profoundly liberating for many in central Europe.⁵ His work had particular pertinence for art historians of 'minority' cultures at the turn of the century who were engaged in documenting (or indeed creating) national artistic traditions as part of the wider project of gaining political and cultural recognition. In this respect, as Ernő Marosi has noted, Strzygowski's work was an important intellectual source in the formation of numerous local nationalist histories of art.⁶

This article examines one example of this appropriation of Strzygowski: the work of the Romanian-Transylvanian art historian, Coriolan Petranu (1893 - 1945). Outside of Romania he is hardly known; his work was largely overshadowed by that of his compatriots George Oprescu (1881-1969) or, more recently, Victor Stoichiță. However, within Romania, Petranu is recognised as an important figure for the development of Romanian art history who, in particular, made a crucial contribution to the documentation and interpretation of the vernacular architecture of Transylvania. Yet his work is of interest not only for its intrinsic scholarly merits but also because it casts light on the complex post-imperial politics of central and south-eastern Europe in the interwar period. Specifically, Petranu's career and research became entangled in the conflicts between Romania and Hungary over the

⁴ Nenad Makuljević, 'The political reception of the Vienna School. Josef Strzygowski and Serbian art history', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 8, 2013.

⁵ The critical literature on Strzygowski is extensive. In his history of the Vienna School Julius von Schlosser noted, tersely, 'Since the other chair was created for Strzygowski to meet his personal goals and purposes, and these have nothing in common with the Vienna School, indeed often contradict them, it can be completely omitted from our historical sketch.' Julius von Schlosser, 'The Vienna School of the History of Art' (1938), translated by Karl Johns, *Journal of Art Historiography*, 1, 2009, 38-39. This set the tone for most subsequent commentators. See, for example, Suzanne Marchand, 'The Rhetoric of Artefacts and the Decline of Classical Humanism: The Case of Josef Strzygowski', *History and Theory* 33.4 (1994): 106-30; Margaret Olin, 'Art History and Ideology: Alois Riegl and Josef Strzygowski' in Penny Schein Gold and Benjamin C. Sax, eds. *Cultural Visions: Essays on the History of Culture*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000, 151-172.

⁶ Ernő Marosi, 'Josef Strzygowski als Entwerfer von nationalen Kunstgeschichten.' In *Kunstgeschichte im Dritten Reich. Theorien, Methoden, Praktiken*, edited by Ruth Heftrig, Olaf Peters and Barbara Schellewald, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008, 103-13.

cultural and political identity of Transylvania. Before examining those wider issues, it is worth considering some basic details concerning Petranu's background.

Coriolan Petranu

Petranu was born in 1893 in the commune of Șiria near the town of Arad in north-western Transylvania. Although now part of Romania the town was, until 1918, ruled by Hungary, as was the rest of Transylvania. He first began to study the history of art at the University of Budapest in 1911, but he then spent two years in Berlin, where he was taught by Adolph Goldschmidt, before eventually moving to Vienna in 1913, where he studied under both Strzygowski and Max Dvořák. From 1917 to 1918 he worked as a curatorial assistant at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, and then returned to Vienna, where he completed his doctorate under Strzygowski on the theoretical subject of *Art History and the Problem of Content*, in 1920.⁷ He was appointed *docent*, or junior lecturer at the University of Cluj in 1919 and was then promoted to full professor in 1928, and he spent his entire career there until his early death in 1945. From 1920 he was also Inspector General of Museums in Romania.⁸

He was not a particularly prolific author, but the work he did produce was significant in that it documented for the first time the Romanian vernacular architecture of Transylvania. Thus, in addition to his doctoral thesis and various shorter essays and articles, he published two volumes on wooden architecture and a further survey volume of the museums of Transylvania and their history.⁹ As inspector of museums he played an important part in re-establishing the museums of Transylvania after the disruptions of the First World War. Most of them had been closed and many of their most valuable collections removed to Budapest for safekeeping. When Transylvania was awarded to Romania after 1918 the Hungarian government resisted returning the collections; it was not until 1922, after protracted negotiations, that the material was given back as part of the Treaty of Trianon.¹⁰ Petranu was also instrumental in establishing the Ethnographic Museum in Cluj, the oldest such museum in Romania, in 1922.

Petranu pioneered the study of Romanian vernacular art and architecture, and in this was galvanised by Strzygowski's espousal of marginalised art forms; his published writings constantly refer back to Strzygowski as a model art historian who respected local cultures and traditions, and this gave him the conviction to

⁷ Coriolan Petranu, *Inhaltsprobleme und Kunstgeschichte*, Vienna: Halm und Goldmann, 1921.

⁸ See Nicolae Sabău, 'Coriolan Petranu (1893-1945). Erforscher der Kunst Transsylvaniens (Siebenbürgens)' in Robert Born and Alena Janatková, ed., *Die kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa und der nationale Diskurs*, Berlin, 2004, 381-95.

⁹ *Bisericile de lemn din județul Arad. Les églises de bois du département d'Arad*, Sibiu: Krafft & Drotleff, 1927; *Monumentele artistice ale județului Bihor I. The wooden churches of the Bihor County*, Sibiu: Krafft & Drotleff, 1931; *Muzeele din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș : trecutul, prezentul și administrarea lor*, Bucharest, 1922.

¹⁰ Petranu writes a critical account of Hungarian behaviour in this context in Petranu, 'Museum Activities in Transylvania', *Parnassus*, 1.5, 1929, 15.

champion the popular art of the Romanians of Transylvania. Indeed, he explicitly asserted that art history in Cluj should be regarded as an extension of the 'Strzygowski' school.¹¹

Petranu was particularly concerned with the wooden ecclesiastical architecture of north-western Transylvania, which were now border territories with the newly diminished Hungarian state. He argued forcefully that the churches he studied represented a vigorous tradition that had borrowed architectural traditions and transformed them into distinctive local forms, making use of the specific properties of the material available to produce an authentic 'style' that he read as the sign of a Romanian national spirit (Figure 1). Petranu placed particular emphasis on the ground plans of the buildings as an indication of their national affinity – a characteristic approach he had inherited from Strzygowski – but he also attended to the paintings within the churches, in order to establish the basic characteristic of Romanian vernacular image making (Figure 2).



Figure 1 Freont Nicoara - The wooden pentecost church of Fildu de Sus, Sălaj County (1727).

Photo: Alexandru Baboș.

¹¹ See Petranu, *Die siebenbürgische Kunstgeschichte und die Forschungen Strzygowskis*. Sonderabdruck aus der Josef Strzygowski-Festschrift. Klagenfurt: Artur Kollitsch Verlag, 1932.

Wooden architecture had become a topic of interest in the final decade of the nineteenth century across much of Europe. Art historians and artists in localities as diverse as Norway, Bohemia, Poland and Russia had 'discovered' it as the authentic expression of regional artistic traditions that deviated from the traditions of the traditional artistic centres of Germany, Italy and France. As such it was one of the central elements of the folk art revival of central Europe, in which architects and designers such as Dušan Jurkovič (1868-1947), Stanisław Witkiewicz (1851-1915) and Károly Kós (1883-1977) drew on traditional forms of wooden vernacular architecture in order to effect a national cultural and spiritual renewal. For Petranu there was an additional, local, significance to the subject, for a central part of his argument was that the Romanian vernacular art and culture of Transylvania had been systematically marginalised. As Petranu commented, 'If he took publications by the Hungarian and Saxon minorities at their word, the foreigner would be under the false impression that it was only the Transylvanian Hungarians and Saxons who had any art.'¹²

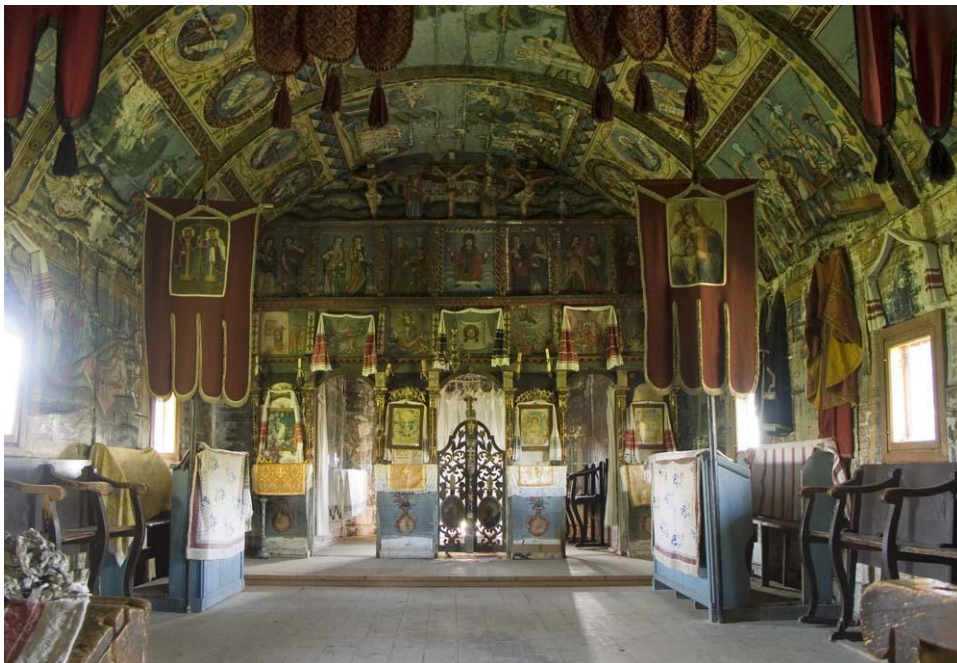


Figure 2 Freont Nicoara - The wooden pentecost church of Fildu de Sus, Sălaj County (1727).
Interior view. Photo: Alexandru Baboș.

In order to investigate this issue in closer detail it is worth considering the earlier traditions of art historical writing on Transylvania. These have been outlined in two recent articles by Robert Born, but it is worth summarising the main issues.¹³

¹² Petranu, *L'Art Roumain de Transylvanie*, Bucharest: La Transylvanie, 1938, 3.

¹³ Robert Born, 'Victor Roth und Hermann Phleps. Zwei Positionen der deutschsprachigen Kunsthistoriographie zu Siebenbürgen in der Zwischenkriegszeit,' in Born and Alena Janatková, eds., *Die Kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa und der nationale Diskurs*, 355-80 and Born, 'Die Wiener

In the middle of the nineteenth century a distinct body of writing about the heritage of Transylvania emerged as a result of the interest of local historians and antiquarians. It was mostly written in German by the local 'Transylvanian Saxons,' descendents of German-speaking settlers who had moved to the area in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Sponsored by the Society for Transylvanian Regional Studies (*Verein für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*), founded in the town of Mediaș in 1840, publications included linguistic studies of Transylvanian German, local histories and editions of historical documents, as well as a journal, the *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, which was first published in 1878. One of the leading local historians was Georg Daniel Teutsch (1817-93), bishop of the Evangelical Church of Augustan Confession (a German Lutheran church), who wrote the multi-volume *History of the Transylvanian Saxons for the Saxon people* and, from 1870, executive of the Society.¹⁴ The fact that the first publications were in German reflected the status of the 'Saxons', who constituted the educational and cultural elite of the region, although as Born notes, the title of Teutsch's history indicates that many were feeling increasingly embattled as a minority, especially after 1867, when the Budapest government introduced a policy of magyarisation across the Hungarian half of the monarchy.

Transylvania was the object of more than local interest, however, with the founding of the Central Commission for the Investigation and Conservation of Architectural Monuments in Vienna in 1850. Charged with the systematic documentation of the historically significant buildings across the Empire, the Commission also published research on Transylvania. Hence, Rudolf von Eitelberger reported on a visit to Nagykaroly (now Carei) in northern Transylvania in the first volume of the Commission's *Yearbook*, and both the *Yearbook* and the Commission's other periodical, the *Mittheilungen*, published a number of articles on the architecture of Transylvania.¹⁵ The authors were all of German origin, however, including Ludwig Reissenberger, a teacher in the Transylvanian Saxon 'capital' of Hermannstadt (Sibiu) or Friedrich Müller, from Bistritz (Bistrița). Of the eleven local conservators for Transylvania employed by the Central Commission five were Transylvanian Saxons, five were Hungarian and just one was identifiably Romanian.¹⁶ This imbalance is all the more striking given that Romanians were the largest single ethnic group inhabiting Transylvania, but it illustrates both the lack of

Schule der Kunstgeschichte und die Kunsthistoriographie in Rumänien der Zwischenkriegszeit,' *Ars*, 41.1, 2008, 112-34.

¹⁴ Georg Daniel Teutsch, *Geschichte der Siebenbürger Sachsen für das sächsische Volk*, 3 volumes, Kronstadt (Brașov), Johann Gott, 1852-58.

¹⁵ Rudolf von Eitelberger, 'Bericht über einen Ausflug nach Ungarn,' *Jahrbuch der Central Commission*, 1, 1856, 105 ff.; Ludwig Reissenberger, 'Die Kirche des heil. Michael zu Michaelsberg in Siebenbürgen,' *Mittheilungen der Central Commission*, 1, 1856, 63-67; Friedrich Müller, 'Die Vertheidigungskirchen in Siebenbürgen,' des heil. Michael zu Michaelsberg in Siebenbürgen,' *Mittheilungen*, 1, 1856, 211-16, 227-31 and 262-72; Ludwig Reissenberger, 'Die bischöfliche Klosterkirche bei Kurtea d'Argyisch in der Walachei,' *Jahrbuch der Central Commission*, 4, 1860, 175-224;

¹⁶ The list of conservators is printed in *Jahrbuch der Central Commission*, 1, 1856, 40.

suitably qualified Romanian speakers as well as the fact that they were held in low esteem by the Vienna authorities.

The absence of involvement on the part of Romanian speakers became even more marked in 1881 when a separate Hungarian authority for monument protection was created, the Hungarian National Monuments Commission (*Magyar Műemlék Országos Bizottsága*), which took over responsibility from the Central Commission in Vienna for monument protection and research in the territories of Hungary. Under the new regime the art of Transylvania was not ignored, but treatment was partial. An instructive example is the so called *Kronprinzenwerk*, a multi-volume encyclopedia of Austria-Hungary that was initiated by Crown Prince Rudolf in 1886 to celebrate the cultural diversity of the Monarchy and to promote mutual understanding of its peoples. Each volume was devoted to a particular crownland or region and contained articles on the economy, natural history, ethnographic portraits of the inhabitants as well as articles on the art, architecture and literature of the territory in question. The volume on Transylvania contained a substantial article by the Hungarian art historian Gyula Pasteiner on architecture, but its rhetoric is revealing.¹⁷ The main focus of interest was on castles and palaces associated with the Hungarian royal family and the Magyar nobility or on Catholic and evangelical churches, in other words, churches of the Hungarian and Saxon communities. Pasteiner also discussed buildings associated with the Szeklers, a distinct Hungarian-speaking ethnic group, indulging, too in speculation on their origins. The wooden Greek Catholic churches of the Romanians are fleetingly mentioned, but in the most dismissive terms; Pasteiner describes them as ‘inartistic constructions,’ the products of a people with a ‘minimal level of culture’ who consequently made no efforts to improve on the basic primitive building types they inherited.¹⁸ Other authors were even more marked in their treatment: the art critics János Szendrei and Jenő Radisics wrote an ambitious survey of Hungarian art which, although devoting an entire volume to Transylvania, made no single reference to the Romanians.¹⁹

The question has to be asked as for the reasons for such marginalisation. There were both deep historical roots as well as more recent causes. Since the fifteenth century there had been three legally recognised groups in Transylvania, the so-called *unio trium nationum*, who were the Hungarian nobility, the Saxons and the Szeklers.²⁰ Conspicuously absent was the mostly Romanian-speaking peasantry, and while this exclusion was initially motivated by their status as peasants, by the nineteenth century this had become entangled in questions of ethnicity.

¹⁷ Julius (Gyula) Pasteiner, ‘Baudenkmäler seit der Begründung des Königreichs Ungarn,’ *Österreich-Ungarn in Wort und Bild: Ungarn (VI Band)*, Vienna: k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1902, 37-100.

¹⁸ Pasteiner, ‘Baudenkmäler seit der Begründung des Königreichs Ungarn,’ 90-91.

¹⁹ János Szendrei and Jenő Radisics, *Magyar műkincsek. Chefs-d'oeuvre d'art de la Hongrie*, Budapest: Műbaratok, 1895-98.

²⁰ As Rogers Brubaker has stated, the three ‘nations’ were not originally ethnic groups, but in the course of the nineteenth century they were re-coded as such. See Brubaker et al, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Other more recent factors built on this older imbalance. From 1867 onwards Transylvania was ruled as an integral part of Hungary, and the Budapest administration, in contrast to that in Vienna, pursued a policy of centralisation that affected political life as well as educational and cultural institutions. Thus, the Transylvanian diet was dissolved as was the German assembly in Hermannstadt (Sibiu), the *universitas saxonum*. Administrative reorganisation took place, and the older feudal divisions were replaced by 'counties' comparable to the administration of the rest of Hungary. Although this affected all non-Hungarian minorities, with Hermannstadt, the regional capital of Saxon Transylvania being stripped of its status, the policy was particularly hostile towards the Romanian population; demands for political autonomy or even assertions of cultural difference were restricted.²¹ The administrative and political reorganisation was also accompanied by a policy of magyarisation, which prioritised universal individual citizenship over the rights of any ethnic or national group. This policy was, on the one hand, ideologically driven by a political class that sought to transform Hungary into a modern nation state like France, but on the other it reflected anxiety over the status of Hungarians in the territory of the Hungarian kingdom. Like the Austro-Germans, Hungarian speakers comprised only a minority of the total population. Unlike Vienna, however, which sought accommodation with various different factions and ethnic groupings, successive administrations in Budapest sought to impose linguistic uniformity. Again, the Romanians were the target of particular hostility because they were blamed in many Hungarian political circles for the failure of the bid for full independence in 1849; Kossuth's attempts to rouse the Romanian peasantry to fight for the Hungarian national cause had been singularly unsuccessful and had been answered instead with a renewed declaration of allegiance to the Habsburg emperor.²²

This confession of imperial loyalty brought few benefits to the Romanian population. It was particularly affected by the imposition of Hungarian language education at primary schools and in general up to 1918 the Romanians constituted the most educationally and economically disadvantaged ethnic group of Transylvania. The only university in Transylvania, the University of Kolozsvár (Cluj), founded in 1872, was a Hungarian language institution. Although Romanian students did attend, mostly in law and theology, their numbers were disproportionately small.²³ Although it at times smacked of paranoia, Petranu's criticism of the systematic neglect of Romanian culture in Transylvania was nevertheless justified, especially as it was articulated against a historical tradition of mutual suspicion and resentment towards the Hungarians by Transylvanian

²¹ On the changing status of Hermannstadt during this period see Harald Roth, *Hermannstadt. Kleine Geschichte einer Stadt in Siebenbürgen*, Vienna, Boehlau, 2006. See especially 'Die moderne Stadt (1850-1918),' 167-89.

²² On the Hungarian war of independence in 1848 and 1849 see Istvan Deak, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians 1848-1849*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.

²³ On the University of Cluj see Zoltán Pálffy, *National Controversy in the Transylvanian Academe: The Cluj/Kolozsvár University in the First Half of the 20th Century*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiado, 2006.

Romanians who viewed them as their historic oppressors.²⁴ Although he was from a comfortable middle-class background that had enabled him to study in Budapest and Vienna as well as abroad, Petranu internalised this antagonistic attitude even though Transylvania was, by the time he matured as a scholar, part of Romania. Indeed, it was continuing conflict with Hungary in the aftermath of the First World War that prompted his first substantial publication, *Revendicările Artistice als Transilvaniei* (The restitution of art to Transylvania).²⁵ The subject of his book was the return of the artistic treasures of Transylvania. As Petranu noted, the two treaties sign after the war, Saint-Germain (1919) that formally dissolved Austria-Hungary and Trianon (1920) that dissolved the former kingdom of Hungary, committed the successor states to returning objects of artistic, cultural and historical significance. Petranu outlined in detail the terms of the treaties and then listed the objects that had been returned to collections in Transylvania. His book was more, however, than a simple report on the repatriation of art objects. The terms of the treaty of Saint Germain only covered those objects that had been in collections in Transylvania before the war and that had been moved to Budapest or elsewhere in Hungary. Petranu, however, was also concerned with Romania's right to lay claim to objects that had been in Vienna, Budapest before the outbreak of the war. The claim was based solely on the fact that they had been produced in Transylvania and, accordingly, he provided a history of metalworking, goldsmithing and glass-working in Transylvania, accompanied with illustrations of objects from the collections of the Hungarian National Museum, the Museum for Art and Industry in Vienna and the Budapest Museum of Arts and Crafts. The implications were clear: the old capitals were still in possession of significant items from the regional heritage of Transylvania, and this was followed with a chapter titled 'What more do we have to demand from Hungary, Austria and Yugoslavia?'²⁶ In addition to a range of non-specified coins, paintings and archaeological objects from museum collections in Arad, Aiud, Gherla, as well as a statue to the poet Sándor Petőfi in Sighișoara, Petranu laid claim to a range of objects (porcelain, embroidery, tapestries and weavings) collected by the Hungarian art historian Arnold Ipolyi when travelling in Transylvania, as well as specified items including an ivory saddle belonging to Vlad the Impaler and prehistoric, Roman and medieval examples of bronze and gold currently in Budapest and Vienna.

In a series of articles published in English in *Parnassus*, the predecessor of *Art Bulletin*, Petranu consistently criticised the work of Hungarian art historians or official Hungarian attitudes towards Transylvania.²⁷ The fact that this was in an

²⁴ Loyalty to the Habsburg crown, however, remained strong, although this was loyalty to Franz Josef as the Austrian emperor rather than as the king of Hungary. See Liviu Maior, *In the Empire: Habsburgs and Romanians*, Cluj – Napoca: Romanian Academy Center for Transylvanian Studies, 2008.

²⁵ Coriolan Petranu, *Revendicările Artistice als Transilvaniei*. Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1925.

²⁶ 'Ce mai avem de revendicat dela Ungaria, Austria și Jugoslavia?' in Petranu, *Revendicările Artistice als Transilvaniei*, 107-54.

²⁷ Coriolan Petranu, 'Museum Activities in Transylvania,' *Parnassus*, 1.5, 1929, 15-17; 'Art Activities in Transylvania during the Past Ten Years,' *Parnassus*, 1.6, 1929, 7-9 and 15; 'Recent Art Events in

American periodical signified Petranu's attempt to internationalise an otherwise local dispute between Romanian and Hungarians, but this inclusion of foreign audiences as well as the use of foreign 'experts' to underpin his claims became a recurrent strategy in much of his writing. Thus, in an article written in 1934 on 'The Wooden Churches of the Romanians of Transylvania in the Light of the Most Recent Appraisals from Abroad' Petranu listed at length the sins and omissions of Hungarian art historians, which include 'Denying and casting obscurity over the national character of the Romanians with forced arguments and resounding phrases such as 'variants of western European culture' or 'regional phenomenon' or 'marginal phenomenon'.²⁸ This stood in opposition to the views of foreign scholars who, he argued, were 'united in their recognition of the artistic and historical value of the wooden churches of Transylvania, and some of whom include uncommonly high words of praise.'²⁹ Published 16 years after the end of the First World War and the transfer of sovereignty over Transylvania, Petranu's polemic might appear to be an anachronism, but this reveals the extent to which Transylvania continued to be a contested territory both politically and culturally.

Transylvania as a zone of conflict

Historically Transylvania was an integral part of Hungary until the battle of Mohács in 1526, when the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent defeated King Louis and brought an end to the Hungarian kingdom. Transylvania gained semi-autonomy as a principality under Ottoman rule, but with the exception of territory to the north-west, which came under Habsburg administration, most of the former kingdom was absorbed into the Ottoman Empire. Although it remained separate from Hungary until 1867, Transylvania occupied a particular place in the Hungarian historical imagination. Cluj was the birthplace of king Matthias Corvinus, whose reign was commonly held to have been a golden age of Hungarian history; more generally, too, Transylvania was held to be a repository of traditional Hungarian culture, a link with the past before Ottoman and then Habsburg rule, and an inalienable part of the Hungarian kingdom.³⁰

This view continued into the twentieth century and was common not only in conservative nationalist circles but also amongst progressive intellectuals. The naturalist painter Simon Hollósy (1857-1918), for example, established an artists' colony in the town of Nágybánya (Baia Mare) in Transylvania 1896, the so-called Free School of Painting which was meant to foster an engagement with the latest artistic innovations in Paris. However, the choice of location, a small town in rural

Transylvania,' *Parnassus*, 2.5, 1930, 21-23; 'Art and Museum Activities in Transylvania,' *Parnassus*, 3.7, 1931, 15-18.

²⁸ Petranu, *Die Holzkirchen der siebenbürger Rumänen im Lichte der neuesten fremden Würdigung*, Sibiu: Krafft & Drottletff, 1934, 63.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁰ See László Kürti, *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination*, New York: SUNY Press, 2001.

Transylvania was motivated by a sentimental vision of the countryside, comparable to that of the contemporary artistic colony in Worpswede or Gauguin's journeys to Brittany, and the artists of Nágybánya combined romantic, mystical, visions of the local landscape with exoticising representations of the local peasantry inhabitants. Rather like the folk art movement elsewhere in central Europe, the Nágybánya colony was driven by the impulse to self-discovery through immersion in peasant culture, and this had distinctly national overtones. In addition to Nágybánya the region of Kalotaszeg in western Transylvania also became the object of a similar sentimental nationalising attitude. The ethnographer Desző Malonyay (1866-1916) dedicated the first volume of his *Art of the Hungarian People* to Kalotaszeg while leading artistic figures such as Aladár Kriesch, founder of the artists' colony of Gödöllő, searched for utopian ideals of communal living in villages such as Körösfő in the region, Kriesch even going so far as to add Körösfő to his name.³¹ A focus of particular interest was the (Hungarian) calvinist church of Körösfő (now Izvoru Crișului) (Figure 3), signalling that such utopian values had distinctly nationalist overtones. As the architect Károly Kós would later state: 'It is essential to live amongst this folk, to find their spirit, to transport into conscious art that which is unconsciously and instinctively Hungarian.'³² Kós, a native of Timișoara, also in Transylvania, wrote extensively on its architecture and while he sought on the one hand to identity a specifically Transylvanian identity, it is clear, too, that he saw it as a seat of Hungarian national identity and showed little interest in the culture of the Romanian majority population. Changing political circumstances did little to alter this basic view; *Crow Castle* (Varjuvár), the house and studio he built in the village of Stana in Kalotaszeg in 1913, remained his permanent home after 1918.

Petranu's work can thus be seen as an attempt to correct the historical record, contesting the place that Transylvania occupied in the Hungarian imaginary. He was especially concerned with combating the disregard for Romanian culture that was a function of both the historically subaltern position of the Romanians as well as contemporary attitudes. The historical *unio trium nationum* had ensured that Romanians were systematically excluded from participation in the cultural life of the region, and Petranu pointed to documents that demonstrated, he argued, how as late as the early nineteenth century municipal councils, for example, denied property rights to Romanians or the right to erect buildings of worship, or access to artistic guilds and associations.³³ Since there were few works of 'high' art and architecture that could be attributed to Romanian artists and architects, vernacular art was all the more important. The folk art movement of the 1880s and 1890s had ensured that folk art achieved recognition, and even though it had come under criticism in subsequent decades from avant-garde artists and critics across central Europe, it continued to be a subject of great interest. Consequently in Petranu's

³¹ Desző Malonyay, *A magyar nép művészete*. Budapest: Franklin-Társulat. 1907-1922. 5 volumes.

³² Károly Kós, cited in Anthony Gall, *Kós Károly műhelye : tanulmány és adattár*, Budapest: Mundus Magyar Egyetemi Kiadó, 2002, 37.

³³ Petranu, *L'Art Roumain de Transylvanie*, 6-8.

work the object of contestation was no longer the merits of local vernacular art and architecture *per se*; rather, it was the question of its national affiliation.



Figure 3 The reformed church of Izvoru Crișului / Körösfő (1764).
Photo: Attila Terbócs

Although Transylvania formally belonged to Romania after 1918, its political and symbolic significance for Hungarians ensured that this transfer was continually contested. As Juliet Kinchin has indicated, there were recurrent attempts to overturn the terms of Trianon Treaty and regain Transylvania (as well as other former Hungarian territories) that frequently sought international support for their cause from figures such as Mussolini and Viscount Rothermere.³⁴ Petranu's efforts to publicise the situation of Transylvania in the pages of *Parnassus* were a mirror image of the campaigns by right-wing Hungarian groups to garner sympathy abroad for the efforts to reverse Trianon.

Transylvania was thus a contested territory and a zone of conflict, but tensions were exacerbated not only by the reluctance in Hungary to accept the redrawing of boundaries but also by the policies of the Romanian government, of which Petranu was a direct beneficiary. The University of Cluj, where he spent his entire professional career, became a flashpoint of conflict between the Hungarian minority and the new State. Founded in 1872, the University (Royal University of

³⁴ Juliet Kinchin, "'Caught in the Ferris Wheel of History'. Trianon Memorials in Hungary,' in Matthew Rampley, ed., *Heritage and Ideology in Central and Eastern Europe: Contested Pasts, Contested Presents*, Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012, 41-66.

Kolozsvár) had been a Hungarian institution – only some 15% of students were ethnic Romanians – and it had cemented the cultural and educational dominance of Hungarians in Transylvania. In May 1919 it was taken over by the new Romanian authorities with a view to nationalizing the University; in fact the initial demand was merely that the Hungarian professors should pledge allegiance to the Romanian king, but their refusal to do so prompted the authorities to dismiss all the professors and replace them with Romanians.³⁵ The intake of new academic staff to the now Romanian university included Petranu and the University, in keeping with the wider expectations of higher education institutions, was dedicated to the state policy objective of addressing the educational deficits of the Romanian population as a whole and also of combating the elite position of the Hungarians. Hungarian students continued to attend, but in small numbers, since a new university was set up in the town of Szeged in south-eastern Hungary, close to the Romanian border, in order to attract Hungarian-speaking citizens of the new Romanian state. Although he presented himself as speaking on behalf of a marginalised nationality, Petranu was acting as an agent of the Romanian state, which in many respects treated its newly acquired Hungarian minority in a similarly discriminatory fashion.

Nationalism and the Romanian state

Petranu was not the only art historian to write about the vernacular culture of Romania. In 1923 the historian Nicolae Iorga authored a full-length study of 'popular art' and in 1929 George Oprescu devoted a volume of *The Studio* to the topic of Romanian peasant art.³⁶ The fact that these were published in French and English indicates their political purpose: to generate international interest in Romanian art and culture and to promote the national cause. Oprescu's volume, dedicated to 'my friend Henri Focillon,' was prefaced with a letter from Queen Marie while Iorga was not only the leading Romanian historian but also prominent in political circles. Yet while these books were replete with references to the idea of vernacular culture as the expression of the national soul of the Romanian people – continuing a central trope of the folk art movement of 50 years earlier – Iorga and Oprescu were fully open to the processes of artistic borrowing, which made it difficult to see certain practices as the specific unique to a particular national group. As Oprescu stated, 'Peasant art is the exclusive apanage of none ... it is rooted in something universally human, common to all, the lowliest like the proudest of nations.'³⁷

Petranu's work had a different quality, for it was consistently hostile to Hungarian historiography, its polemical points often overshadowing its positive

³⁵ For more details on the episode see Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nationa Building and Ethnic Struggle 1918-1930*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995, 211-44.

³⁶ Nicolae Iorga, *L'Art populaire roumaine: son caractère, ses rapports et son origine*, Bucharest: Gamber, 1923; George Oprescu, *Peasant Art in Roumania. Special Autumn Number of The Studio*. London: The Studio, 1929.

³⁷ Oprescu, *Peasant Art in Roumania*, 5.

scholarly insights. This occasionally led to the sterile tactic of merely listing disparaging or dismissive remarks by Hungarian art historians and then countering them with assertions to the contrary by other art historians.³⁸ Indeed, his attacks on what he saw to be the Hungarian appropriation of Romanian culture even led him into a dispute with the composer Béla Bartók. The latter, he argued, had claim to certain melodic forms as 'Hungarian' thereby denying the specificity of the Romanian folk music of the region.³⁹ His attack was so fierce that Bartók felt compelled to respond with a point by point repudiation of Petranu's arguments.⁴⁰ Much more than Iorga and Oprescu, Petranu was concerned first of all with validating the Romanian art of Transylvania, and this also included making qualitative comparisons. On the one hand, he argued, it was clear that arguing that Romanian art was 'superior' to Hungarian or Saxon art was inappropriate and should not be part of scholarly discourse. On the other, he stated 'the attachment to a Byzantine tradition in a western confessional milieu created by Hungarian domination and Saxon privilege is a sign of strength, of independence and self-awareness.'⁴¹ In other words, the distinctive features of Romanian art were signifiers of the moral character of Romanians, and thus, implicitly, of their moral superiority in the face of adversity. Moreover, Petranu had not hesitation in concluding that Romanian vernacular art was superior to that of the Slavs 'in terms of its autochthonous archaic character ... its riches and its artistic qualities.'⁴²

A key strategy was to seek legitimation *beyond* Romania; his writings repeatedly drew attention to the admiring comments of art historians from abroad, which seemed to confirm his own arguments. Thus, in pointed criticism of 'Hungarian art history in the service of revisionism' he argued that 'what strikes all foreign visitors is not only the linguistic uniformity, but also the uniformity of the vernacular culture in all the provinces inhabited by Romanians, as well as its quality.'⁴³ Moreover, he added, 'According to Henri Focillon Romanian vernacular art has remained true to ancient forms, but without repeating itself, because the peasant artists are poets ... Such are the timeless aptitudes of the Romanian race.'⁴⁴ Petranu's argument had an insistence that was absent in the work of his compatriots. This can be explained by the fact that his thinking was shaped not only as a response to the historic treatment of the Romanian population by the Budapest regime, or to the relation between Hungary and Romania after 1918, but also by internal debates over the nature of Romanian identity. In order to investigate this

³⁸ See for example Petranu, *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Siebenbürger Rumänen im Lichte der bisherigen Forschung*, Cluj: Cartea Românească, 1927; *Bisericile de Lemn ale Românilor Ardeleni*, Sibiu: Krafft & Drotleff, 1934.

³⁹ Coriolan Petranu, *M. Béla Bartók et la musique roumaine*, Bucharest: Revue de Transylvanie, 1937.

⁴⁰ Béla Bartók, 'Answer to the Petranu Attack,' in Bartók, *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992, 227-38.

⁴¹ Petranu, *L'Art Roumain de Transylvanie*, 94-5.

⁴² *Ibid*, 95.

⁴³ Petranu, 'L'Histoire de l'art hongrois au service de révisionnisme,' in *Revue de Transylvanie* 1.1, 1934, 83.

⁴⁴ Petranu, *ibid.*, 85.

further it is worth recalling some of the basic aspects of the emergence of modern Romania.

The Romanian state grew out of the two principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, which were united in 1859 under Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza. The United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, officially renamed the Romanian Principate in 1866, were nominally still subject to Ottoman rule, but following a declaration of independence were formally recognised as an independent sovereign state in 1878 at the Treaty of Berlin. In 1881 the Principate was upgraded to become a Kingdom.⁴⁵ In the period between 1878 and 1914 it achieved modest territorial gains in Southern Dobrudja – on the eastern border with Bulgaria to the South - but essentially remained unchanged during this period. Significant Romanian populations lived beyond its borders, particularly, in Transylvania to the North West, and the idea of unifying all Romanians in one state remained a long-term policy objective. Participation in the Great War on the side of the victorious Allies resulted in the award of Transylvania, the former Habsburg territory of Bukovina and Bessarabia, which had formerly been part of Moldavia but had been annexed by Russia in 1812.

The new political arrangement after the First World War united nearly all Romanian speakers into one single state, but the newly expanded kingdom also included substantial minorities of Germans, Jews, Hungarians, Russians and Bulgarians who, together, comprised some 28% of the population. Having been a marginalised and oppressed minority Romanians now found themselves governing a state that had to reach an accommodation with its own minorities. Its record during the period between 1918 and 1939 was hardly exemplary and for all Petranu's complaints about the attitudes of Hungarian scholars, the Romanian government singled out its newly acquired Hungarian minority for particular discriminatory treatment.

In many respects the complexities of this post-war situation and the challenges it presented for notions of national and state identity exacerbated what had already been an extended process of self-interrogation that had preceded even the formation of the independent state in 1878. Romanian ideologues struggled to define Romania, or to establish where it belonged. The question of the origins of the Romanians was keenly debated (and has continued to be); some saw them as the direct descendents of the ancient Dacian people conquered by Trajan in the second century CE, while others stressed their link to the Romans, and the Latin origins of the Romanian language supported this belief.⁴⁶ Although Romanian is a complex amalgam of differing linguistic influences, its Latin roots were used to highlight its difference from the neighbouring Slavic and Hungarian languages and cultures, and affinities were actively sought with other Romance-speaking nations, in particular, France. At the same time, the predominance of the Orthodox religion (and until the

⁴⁵ On the history of Romania and the granting of independence see Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, especially 'Independence, 1866-1881,' 11-55.

⁴⁶ On the debates on Romanian origins see Lucian Boia, *Romania: Borderland of Europe*, London: Reaktion, 2001, 28-58 and Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*. Budapest: CEU Press, 2001.

mid-nineteenth century Romanian was written in the Cyrillic script) pointed to the deep cultural affiliations with the Serbs, Bulgarians and the Greeks. There were comparable attempts at self-definition in the visual arts. Shona Kallestrup has recently shown how, on the one hand, Romanian artists, designers and architects sought to emulate their neighbours by creating a 'national style' but also how, on the other, they failed to achieve anything more than an amalgam of different borrowed motifs and themes.⁴⁷

Attempts to define Romanian identity were thus beset by various ambiguities and these spilled over into debates over Romania's place in Europe. Active efforts were made to 'modernise' the state through emulation of Western European models, a process which accelerated under the Hohenzollern monarch Carol, who acceded to the throne 1866 (following the overthrow of Alexandru Ioan Cuza). However, this was contested in many quarters; the *Junimea* (Youth) Society was founded in Iași in 1863 by a group of western-educated intellectuals who, ironically, were fiercely critical of the superficial importation of Western cultural and social institutions. Led by the literary critic Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917), who had studied philosophy at the Humboldt University and the University of Giessen, the *Junimea* circle accused the project of modernisation of being little more than the empty imitation of the outward *form* of western European culture and society. Drawing on romantic currents in German social thinking – as well as the ideas of social evolution of Herbert Spencer and Henry Thomas Buckle – the *Junimea* critics stressed the importance of facilitating an endogenous organic social and cultural development, rather than importing an arbitrary range of alien cultural forms.⁴⁸

A similar critique was articulated by Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), editor of the review *Sămănătorul* ('The Sower') from 1904 to 1910. The ideology of 'samanatorism' that Iorga promulgated advanced the notion that the way forward for Romania was the rejection of foreign cultural influence and the pursuit of moral rebirth to be attained, primarily, through an embrace of rural values – for the peasantry were deemed to be the soul of the Romanian people – and such values were to be supported by sending teachers to the countryside to educate and 'remind' the peasantry of past tradition.⁴⁹

This deeply reactionary outlook was of course completely inadequate as a response to the numerous economic, social and political challenges facing Romania, but it exercised considerable appeal. Iorga eventually became prime minister in 1931, but even before the First World War he had been active politically. In 1895 he had co-founded the Universal Antisemitic Alliance (*Alianței Antisemite Universale*)

⁴⁷ Shona Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania 1866-1917: Local and International Aspects of the Search for National Expression*, Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 2006.

⁴⁸ On the *Junimea* circle and debates about social development in Romania see Hitchins, *Rumania*, 55-89. See, too, Diana Stanciu, 'Forms without Substance or Synchronism? Attempts to Define Culture and Civilisation in Early Twentieth-Century Romania,' *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 20.1, 2013, 39-66.

⁴⁹ Iorga first articulated his critical position in *La Vie Intellectuelle des Roumains en 1899*, Bucharest: L'Indépendance roumaine, 1899, and *Opinions pernicieuses d'un mauvais patriote*, Bucharest: L'Indépendance roumaine, 1900.

with the far-right politician Alexandru Cuza and later, in 1910, the two also set up the Democratic Nationalist Party (*Partidul Naționalist-Democrat*) in 1910. In the 1920s Cuza went on to found the National Christian Defence League (*Liga Apărării Național-Creștine*) along with Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, who would later be the leader of Romania's own fascist organisation, the Legion of the Archangel Michael. This strain of political and social thought admittedly only represented one intellectual current in Romania; there were others who argued for much more open and cosmopolitan attitudes towards western Europe.⁵⁰ It was, nevertheless the cultural conservatism of thinkers such as Iorga that enjoyed the most widespread public influence. On the one hand such views presented understandable criticisms of what was seen as an overly deferential attitude towards the cultures of western Europe, yet they included a complex mixture of envy and resentment, combined with a deep-rooted inferiority complex. Many Romanians resented the fact that despite their apparent classical roots nobody seemed to have heard of them. As the philosopher Emil Cioran (1911-1995) stated: 'Being Romanian is a dreadful thing. No woman will give you a second glance, and otherwise decent people will smirk; if they see you are smart they will assume you are a confidence trickster. But what did I do wrong to bear the shame of a nation without history?'⁵¹ Other well-known Romanian intellectuals, such as the historian of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) were equally drawn into espousing such a reactionary outlook; indeed, their subsequent embarrassment at this intoxication during the 1920s and 1930s with this defensive and xenophobic attitude led to a subsequent disavowal of their own past.⁵²

The newly expanded Romanian state of interwar period incorporated a diverse array of minorities, but now the object of hostility was no longer imported alien *ideas*, but rather imported aliens themselves, in particular, the Hungarians and the Jews, who suffered disproportionately from the State's efforts to 'Romanise' its inhabitants, and were viewed by many as the agents of an imaginary threat to the integrity of the nation.

Petranu's work became increasingly aligned with this current. In this context his choice of subject, wooden churches, also merits analysis. A large proportion of the churches he chose had been built in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. They were built in a period, he argued, of comparative freedom, for this comprised an interlude between otherwise remorseless Hungarian dominance. As such they provided a most powerful index of the Romanian creative spirit. Moreover, while Petranu was in part constrained by the available subject matter, his decision to study rural church architecture had a further ideological resonance. In his study of the wooden architecture of Bihor Petranu claimed:

⁵⁰ An outline of the varying positions is provided by Keith Hitchins, 'The Great Debate,' in Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947*, 292-224.

⁵¹ Cioran, cited in Marta Petreu, *An Infamous Past. E. M. Cioran and the Rise of Fascism in Romania*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 20.

⁵² On Eliade's fascination with the Iron Guard see Claudio Mutti, *Mircea Eliade e la Guardia di Ferro*, Rome: Quaderni del Veltrò, 1989.

... everywhere in Transylvania the wooden churches are the emanation of the mass-personality, of the folk-soul. Their builders are simple peasants ... All who have seen the Rumanian wooden churches have admired the fully-developed art, the silhouette, the proportions, the solidity of the structures, the careful design, the plan of light and shadow, the artistic detail, the harmonious fusion with environment, the gravity, mystery, power and grace of the whole ... the revelation of the Rumanian folk-soul ...⁵³

It is worth noting here the rhetorical passage from reference to concrete architectural details towards aesthetic notions and, finally, a quasi-theological invocation of Romanian identity based on notions of mystery and grace. This final flourish was no accident; not only is it in keeping with the subject matter – *ecclesiastical* architecture – it also repeated a common trope of nationalist theories of Romanian identity, which lent great weight to its orthodox heritage as a defining feature. Religious conservatism was central to the ideological programme of Iorga and others, but it achieved its most extreme expression in the doctrines of Zeleanu Codreanu's Iron Guard, which combined bio-political notions of identity with a Messianic sense of mystical self-sacrifice for the Roman nation.⁵⁴

In the later 1930s Petranu's writings on Romanian art took on a darker tone, as he moved into the orbit of reactionary political thought. In the 1930s he published a number of essays in the German journal *Südostdeutsche Forschungen*, including 'The Concept and Investigation of National Art' and 'The Renaissance Art of Transylvania. New Hungarian Points of View and Attempts to Revalue It.'⁵⁵ The choice of journal alone was significant, and it is worth lingering on this for a while. Research into the culture and history of south-eastern Europe (*Südostforschung*) was an established field of study, and before the First World War it had been closely linked to the geopolitical interests of the Habsburg Monarchy. Leading figures such as the historians Hugo Hassinger (1877-1952) or Hans Hirsch (1878-1940) had been based at the University of Vienna, which had been the main centre for research into the region.⁵⁶ After 1918, however, it was other political imperatives that drove the field forward. The journal *Südostdeutsche Forschungen* was established in 1936 by the

⁵³ Petranu, 'New Researches in the Art of Woodbuilding in Transylvania,' trans. D. Berenberg, in *Monumentele Istorice ale Județului Bihor: Bisericele di Lemn*, 63-64.

⁵⁴ Codreanu spelled out his ideas in his tract *For my Legionaries* (Pentru Legionari) published in 1936. See Corneliu Codreanu, *For my Legionaries*, trans. D. Gazdaru, York, SC: Liberty Bell Publications, 3rd edition, 2003. On Codreanu see Ewald Hibbern, *Codreanu und die eiserne Garde*, Siegen: Herder Bibliothek, 1984 and Radu Ioanid, *Sword of the Archangel. Fascist Ideology in Romania*, trans. Peter Heinegg. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1990.

⁵⁵ Coriolan Petranu, 'Begriff und Erforschung der nationalen Kunst,' *Südostdeutsche Forschungen* II (1937); 'Die Renaissancekunst Siebenbürgens. Neue ungarische Gesichtspunkte und Umwertungsversuche', in: *Südost-Forschungen* 4, 1939, 307-338.

⁵⁶ Petra Svatek, ' 'Wien als Tor nach dem Südosten.' Der Beitrag Wiener Geisteswissenschaftler zur Erforschung Südosteuropas während des Nationalsozialismus,' in Mitchell G. Ash, Wolfram Nieß and Ramon Pils, eds, *Geisteswissenschaften im Nationalsozialismus. Das Beispiel der Universität Wien*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010, 111-40.

Austrian historian Fritz Valjavec (1909-1960) and was sponsored by the Südost-Institut or, to give it its proper title, 'Institut zur Erforschung des deutschen Volkstums im Süden und Südosten,' of the University of Munich (now at the University of Regensburg), which was set up in 1930. The Institute was originally concerned with researching German settlement and migration patterns in south-eastern Europe, and had close links to the Institute for East Bavarian Research into Heimat at the nearby University of Passau. The emphasis on Heimat indicates the 'völkisch' cultural politics that were at stake, and these were sharpened when Valjavec began working at the Institute in 1935. Becoming its Director in 1940, Valjavec interpreted the mission of the Institute and of 'Südostforschung' to be wider than simply the study of cultures of German migrant communities, and instead widened the focus to cover all cultures of South-Eastern Europe (although this was not given a clear territorial definition).⁵⁷

'Südostforschung' was thus closely aligned with the cultural politics of the Third Reich and paralleled the development of 'Ostforschung', the principal function of which was to demonstrate the decisive contribution of the Germans to the culture and history of the territories occupied by the recreated Polish Republic.⁵⁸ Indeed, it is notable that Vienna School-trained art historians were prominent in this enterprise; perhaps the most notorious was Dagobert Frey (1883-1962), a student of Strzygowski, who was involved in the establishment of the Institut für deutsche Ostarbeit at the University of Breslau and who, alongside his work in assisting the plundering by the SS of the National Museum in Warsaw, published a historical survey of Cracow in which the Polish and Jewish inhabitants were remarkable for their absence.⁵⁹ Valjavec was himself politically committed to the cultural politics of the Nazi state; a Nazi-party member since 1933, he had worked in Bukovina for an SS Einsatzgruppe in 1941 and as part of the de-Nazification process after the war had been relieved of his post – although in 1955 he returned once more as Director of the Institute.

While *Südostdeutsche Forschungen* was aligned with the racial and cultural policies of the Nazi state, its contributors were drawn from a wide range of nationalities, including Hungarians and Romanians. This reflected political and ideological realities. Hungary and Romania were allied to Nazi Germany, and the chauvinistic nationalism in both states was in keeping with contemporary discourses on race, identity and nation in Germany. Indeed, there were commonalities between the biological racism of Nazi and conservative German identity politics and the bio-political tenets current in interwar Romanian social discourse. Petranu, too, employed biological terms as a tool of cultural analysis. Thus, when explaining patterns of cultural dissemination and influence in an article on the spread of Romanian popular culture, he wrote: 'Amongst certain

⁵⁷ Matthias Beer, ed., *Südostforschung im Schatten des Dritten Reiches: Institutionen, Inhalte, Personen*, (Oldenbourg, 2004).

⁵⁸ On Ostforschung see Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards. A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁵⁹ Dagobert Frey, *Krakau*, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1941.

populations, such as the Siculs, the Changai, the Craşoveni, one is entitled to talk not only of Romanian influence, but of the most ancient Romanian basis of their art ... the cause being the powerful admixture of Romanian blood.'⁶⁰

With an increasingly chauvinistic and nationalistic vision of Romanian identity, Petranu clearly saw an affinity with the values of *Ostforschung*, and it is notable that in his earlier writings he had drawn heavily on the observations of German and Austrian authors, in particular, Strzygowski, to support his claims regarding the Romanian character of the wooden architecture of Transylvania. Petranu's understanding of 'national' was also in accord with the racial basis of much German, Austrian and Romanian scholarship of the time, and it had more than a passing resemblance to the outlook of his teacher Strzygowski, who saw the history of art as shaped by patterns of biological inheritance.

The ostensible purpose of Petranu's essay on 'national art' essay was to counter the tendency of Hungarian art historians to include the art of the non-Hungarian minorities of Transylvania in the general history of Hungarian art. In contrast, Petranu argued, 'we should not regard the political state and the political nation as our starting point or our point of orientation but rather the folk, the ethnos, as a naturally given unity.'⁶¹ The characteristics of national art were derived from the essence of the nation (*Nationalwesen*), he argued, and while a national style can be a hybrid product (*Mischstil*), Petranu drew back from the implications of this latter admission, arguing that 'Although they may have co-existed for hundreds of years, powerful artistic distinctions can be made between nations in a multi-ethnic state; for example, the Saxons of Transylvania, with their occidental art, or the Romanians, with their Byzantine art.'⁶² Moreover, he stated, 'we know that even when mixed, races are not lost, but merely produce new combinations, and that whoever has taken on a national identity does not lose the taste, the temperament, the instinct and the affective preferences of their ethnicity.'⁶³ A clear rebuttal of ideas of assimilation or hybridity, Petranu's comments were clearly targeted at the various minorities in Romania. And this notion of racial and ethnic identity translates into a programme of national art history that includes the 'elimination,' for example, of artworks that may be on the national territory, but which are by 'foreign' artists.

Conclusion

Petranu's nationalistic politics are often ignored or underplayed by Romanian commentators. As one recent author has suggested, the tirades against Hungary,

⁶⁰ L'Influence de l'art populaire des Roumains sur les autres peuples de Roumanie et sur les peuples voisins,' in *Revue de Transylvanie*, 2-3, 1935-36, 320. Cited in Michael Wedekind, 'Wissenschaftsmilieus und Ethnopolitik im Rumänien der 1930/1940er Jahre,' in Josef Ehmer, ed., *Herausforderung Bevölkerung. Zu Entwicklungen des modernen Denkens über die Bevölkerung vor, im und nach dem 'Dritten Reich'*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2007, 238.

⁶¹ Petranu, 'Begriff und Erforschung der nationalen Kunst,' 1.

⁶² Ibid., 5.

⁶³ Ibid., 7.

and the racist understanding of national identity, should be regarded as minor deviations from an otherwise solid oeuvre of scholarly research.⁶⁴ Yet, these 'forays' constituted a large proportion of Petranu's output, and the attitudes underlying them are also present in his larger-scale writings on the wooden ecclesiastical architecture.

It is perhaps tempting to dismiss Petranu's work as a product of the febrile atmosphere informing Hungarian-Romanian relations during the first half of the twentieth century. A toxic mixture of historic resentment and essentialist and biological notions of identity gave rise to an oeuvre that often amounted to little more than sterile point-scoring or, at worst, troublingly racist attitudes towards idea of nation and the place of minorities in the Romanian state. Yet it also casts an instructive light on some of the darker sides of the legacy of the Vienna School. Petranu was heir to Strzygowski in a number of ways; like so many other art historians from central and eastern Europe, he found in his teacher's work a source of empowerment that challenged canonical narratives of art history. This involved advocacy of the value of Romanian vernacular culture as well as contestation of traditional political and cultural hierarchies. He also inherited Strzygowski's reactionary political views, however, which became increasingly aligned with the cultural policies of the German and Romanian states during the 1930s.

This topic might be of limited interest were it not for the fact that it raised issues that have remained, in certain respects, unresolved. Cluj, where Petranu was based, became the focus of further cultural antagonism between the Hungarians and Romanians in the 1990s, when the nationalist mayor Gheorghe Funar sought to antagonise the Hungarian population of the city by targeting, amongst others, prominent public monuments and sites associated with the Hungarian rule in the past.⁶⁵ More generally, too, the reconstruction of identities in central and eastern Europe since 1989, in which the visual arts have played a significant role, has not infrequently been accompanied by a shrill tone reminiscent of that earlier period. Consideration of Petranu foregrounds the treacherous political waters that were crossed when traditional art historical hierarchies were challenged as well as highlighting the continuing relevance of an episode in the cultural politics of Transylvania in the 1920s and 1930s.

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⁶⁴ See Vlad Țoca, 'Arhitectura religioasă de lemn a românilor ardeleni, parte fundamentală a operei lui Coriolan Petranu,' *Historia*, 3, 2007, 7-22.

⁶⁵ This episode is analysed in Paul Stirton, 'Public Sculpture in Cluj / Koloszvár,' in Rampley, ed., *Heritage, Ideology and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, 41-66.